

## **Women's Forum: Women's Role In A Changing Ukraine's Future**

Remarks

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Thank you, Ambassador Tefft. Hello everyone. I want to welcome all of you to this forum. And let me extend my greeting to Ukraine's Minister of Social Policy, Natalya Korolevska. I am so pleased to participate in this very important event. I am also happy to see many of the women who participated in the "Invest for the Future" conference in Warsaw last fall.

As I look around the room, I see successful women who are taking charge of their own futures. I also see a room full of leaders who can become an even greater force for leadership and economic growth — who cannot only build economies, but change assumptions about gender; who can not only change the way that people see the world but influence behavior across society; who can help change societies, because when you change societies, boys and girls are born into a new world with very different projected ideas of what they can become — and how they should relate to each other. And then there is real change.

The fact is, women are among the most untapped human resources that humanity has to offer. They are half of the world's population. Yet they only hold one-fifth of the positions in businesses and governments.

Men are sitting in their seats instead — in the chambers of parliaments, in corporations, and around negotiating tables.

This isn't about one gender taking away from the other. It's not a zero sum game, in which men must lose for women to gain. It's about making sure men and women are represented equally in decision-making circles — not only because it's morally fair. But also because gender equality is an economic imperative. Economies cannot thrive where half the population remains underrepresented. And without the best representation of women and men in problem-solving and leadership circles, we are denying ourselves the best chance of addressing our challenges.

Women all over the world are fighting to change this state of affairs and to change their lives and their communities. One of the ways women can do this is by becoming entrepreneurs — because it's very often their only possibility of earning an income. It can also lead to much more: not just independence and self-respect, but prosperity. The businesses they create may start small, but they can expand, and employ men and women in the process. And when that happens, economies begin to grow.

Not only that, being entrepreneurs helps women support their families. Studies have shown that when women have increased financial resources, they often spend their income on their children's

education. And that can lead to generations of better educated leaders. This makes investment in women a long-term investment in more inclusive, profitable – and better led – societies.

Empowering women as economic and political and social leaders isn't just a matter of being right. It's a matter of being smart. And one way to understand their potential impact is to ask what we might call a question in reverse: What is the cost of women not participating and not sharing in economic and other leadership?

We can measure that cost in unrealized profits, unrealized economic growth. We can measure it in unrealized democratic societies, closed access to opportunity, and the loss of entire generations. We can measure it, too, in the mounting levels of religious intolerance, gender-blind legislation, compromised conflict resolution, and even violent extremism that are more likely to occur.

Around the world, we have seen much progress on gender equality. And in the United States, we can be proud of the gains we have made over the past few decades. Women in the United States may still sometimes face stereotyping or discrimination because of their gender, but they have the law on their side.

But the fact remains, no country in the world has yet achieved full gender equality. And until then, there is still more work to be done.

The time has come for all women, including Ukrainian women, to determine what they want to do and how far they want to go.

If they want to break the glass ceiling that blocks them from getting to the top, they must claim and generate opportunities to both lead and succeed. They must educate themselves about the values and policy views of decision-makers at every level. They must make themselves aware of their rights and find ways to advocate for them, as well as access to equal opportunity.

One way to do that is by forming associations that can help women organize and become stronger advocates for a better business environment. And that's why I recognize the role of events like this one, so you can hear the success stories and exchange ideas with some of the most dynamic women in the Ukrainian business world today.

When I told you earlier that I saw a room full of leaders, I wasn't just speaking with hope for women's futures – but everyone's. We are in this together, and our goal is to make sure that we have an equal representation as leaders in our economies so we can share in their outcomes as equal partners. That's why what we do – at this forum and in the future – is so important.

I want to wish everyone a very productive day of work sessions, conversations, and future connections. And I thank you all for giving me this opportunity to talk to you.